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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1991 a two-part questionnaire was mailed to a nationwide sample of 100 uppersecondary teachers in England. Usable responses were received from 72 teachers. The purposes of this study were the following: (1) to describe the impact of the 1988 British Reform Act on Education; (2) to determine teacher perceptions in selected publicly funded schools in England; and (3) to examine the feasibility of using British reforms as a basis for improving education in the United States. The findings indicated that while a large majority of the teachers sampled approved of the idea of a national curriculum and national assessment, an equally overwhelming majority disapproved of the current reforms. Many comments were written on the returned questionnaires that expressed teacher resentment toward reforms conceived, designed, and implemented by a variety of nonteachers with an almost complete lack of teacher input. Based on survey responses, it is recommended that a national curriculum should not be a priority in the United States at this time. Quarterly conferences with strong teacher representation should be scheduled to find ways to upgrade student expectations and performance. (27 references) (MLF)

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The Impact of the 1988 British Reform Act on Teachers in England: Some Implications for Education in the United States

Thomas B. Henry

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The Impact of the 1988 British Reform Act on Teachers in England: Some Implications for Education in the United States

Abstract

This study was undertaken during the spring of 1991 and consisted of a two part questionnaire which was field tested and subsequently mailed to upper secondary teachers in England. The purposes of this study were to i) describe the impact of the 1988 British Reform Act on Education; and ii) to determine teacher perceptions in selected publicly-funded schools in England, and iii) to examine the feasibility of using British reforms as a basis for improving education in the United States. The findings indicated that while a large majority of the teachers sampled approved of the idea of a national curriculum and national assessment; an equally overwhelming majority disapproved of the current reforms They bewailed the fact that there had been an almost complete lack of teacher input in the reforms. Many comments were written on the returned questionnaires which expressed teacher resentment towards reforms conceived, designed and implemented by a variety of non-teachers such as; politicians, civil servants and business leaders.

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Introduction

A number of eminent educators such as Adler, Bell, Boyer, Goodlad and Sizer have authored reports on the state of education in the United States In addition, business leaders such as Lee Iococca have shown an interest and awareness of the overall problem. During a recent P.B.S. television interview, H Ross Perot (1990) voiced his concern and reiterated the fact that America had lost its status as the chief economic super-power. There is agreement between educators and business leaders on one point; that we are not educating our children as well as our foreign competitors.

In the 1980s England was confronted with similar problems and concerns in its economy as the United States faces in the 1990s. Performance of the English economy was linked to student performance in the schools. This resulted in the enactment of radical legislation in an attempt to address the concerns and regain the economic edge. In short it mandated a move away from a partially decentralized education system to a totally centralized system in line with the other education systems of the European Community.

In 1989 President Bush met at a summit conference with the nation's State Governors in an effort to co-ordinate actions and adopt a number of resolutions aimed at placing the United States in the forefront of education and economics by the year 2000. With that in mind, this study focused on the radical reforms contained in the 1988 British Education Reform Act. An attempt was made to analyze teacher perceptions of the reforms and evaluate the findings.

Significance of the Study

Neither textbooks nor curricula by themselves are responsible for teaching children. In the final analysis,teachers, teach children, and since it is they who have the final say with regard to what children are taught, it is pertinent that this study addressed the perceptions of the teacher. Similar surveys have been conducted in the United States and the results have been revealing. Tyler (1987) notes the following about teachers in the United States:

> Clearly, teachers are the most significant factors in implementing a school reform. Unless teachers have participated in identifying the problems or inadequacies of the school and in developing workable and promising solutions they may not believe that a given problem exists or

that a proposed solution will be an improvement over current practices. (p. 280)

Although a random sample of teachers in England was interviewed, the findings are representative of the population and reflect their current perceptions. Upper secondary school teachers in Grammar, Secondary Modern, Comprehensive, Special and High Schools were surveyed. Questionnaires were sent to inner city, urban and rural schools.

Comparative studies of other education systems are important for the healthy growth of education in the United States. If the British reforms can illuminate the education problems of this country, then the findings and recommendations made in this study should be examined closely.

Literature Review

Prior to the commencement of the study an extensive review of relevant literature was conducted in three areas.

First of all the historical genesis and early nineteenth century was outlined. At that time the government was very apathetic, and even proud, of its non-involvement in education. While private schools took care of the needs of the middle and upper classes, the masses remained uneducated. However, attitudes began to

change with the news of Horace Mann's success with the Common Schools in the U.S.A. The progress of schools in Europe had a similar effect and prompted an outcry for public schools to be created and funded by the government. The last thirty years of the nineteenth century were momentous and great strides were made in public education as a result of a number of education acts.

Secondly, the interest and activity generated in the late nineteenth century carried over into the twentieth century, culminating in the Reform Act of 1944. This was described as a milestone in English education. This Act greatly expanded and improved public education. Not only did it mandate free secondary schooling for all students, but is became a framework for education for the next forty years.

Some of the biggest changes in English education in the twentieth century became law with the historic 1988 Education Reform Act. It provided for:

1. a national elementary and secondary school core curriculum of ten subjects: English and Math, 10% of teaching time; Sciennce, 10 - 20%; Technology, History, Geography, Modern Foreign Language, Art, Music and Drama, 10% each; Physical Education, 5%, with the remaining time for non-compulsory electives such as the Classics;
2. mandatory National Assessment at ages 7, 11, 14 and

16, to monitor student progress;

3. opportunity for secondary and larger elementary schools, by vote of parents and principals, to opt-out of local control and receive funding from the National Department of Education and Science;
4. open enrollment, permitting schools to accept students outside the neighborhood, as pace and faculty permit, resulting in better schools admitting more and brighter students, thus getting more funding, and forcing poorer schools to improve, or close;
5. tighter financial control of Britain's 47 universities, and no tenure for new faculty. (Those appointed before November 1987 retain tenure);
6. 20 Polytechnical Colleges, 346 other colleges transferred from local to national control and finance; and
7. new City Technology Colleges (secondary school level, ages 11 - 18) linked to industry and international trade needs.

Thirdly, contemporary literature of the eighties was reviewed. Articles from a number of British journals were considered. Opinion of the 1988 Reform Act ranged from open hostility to the cynical yet practical view of the classroom teacher having the final say with regard to curriculum.

Description of the Population - Teachers in England

According to Male (1988) "In area, England is about the size of the state of Michigan and smaller than the state of Missouri. England's density of population is one of the highest in the world. Although there are still villages and small towns, England is basically an urbanized country, and has to contend with the social problems that urbanization brings" (p. 1325). About 94% of the school enrollment is in the publicly-funded schools. There are six Metropolitan Counties and forty Non-Metropolitan Counties in England. The following counties shaded on the map indicate the scope of the population surveyed.

General Procedure

Initially, an intensive study of the 1988 United Kingdom Education Reform Act was undertaken. In order to add perspective and place the momentous document within the context of education in England, a comprehensive analysis of historical and contemporary material having a bearing on the 1988 Reform Act was undertaken. Attention was focused on the history of education in England during the past 150 years. Specifically the various stages were traced; from non-govermental control of education, through the evolution of a number of statutes, finally culminating in total national control. The contemporary material studied

consisted mainly of the reactions of various researchers and faculty from colleges of education in England. The bulk of this material was in the form of journal articles written between 1987 and 1991. This material was analyzed and evaluated and had a distinct bearing on the format and composition of the instrument used in the collection of data.

Instrument Design

Since the research undertaken was descriptive in nature, a two-part questionnaire was used to collect data. Part I covered the four areas addressed in the Reform Act. They are; The National Curriculum, The National Assessment, Open Enrollment and National Control. Statements dealing with aspects of these critical issues feature prominently in the questionnaire. Teachers were requested to react to eighteen statements and register their responses. Since all the statements required fixed responses, it was possible to address a broad spectrum of topics and tabulate the data in an economic format. A five choice Likert scale was adapted to register the responses.

Part II of the questionnaire requested biographic and demographic information and multiple category questions were posed. These questions followed a natural sequence and responses were made by placing a check mark to indicate

MAP OF ENGLAND SHOWING THE EXTENT OF THE POPULATION SURVEYED

choice. The results were
convenient analysis.

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England is a densely popul
teachers, it was considere
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representation of the popu
sources were used to obtai
participate in the study.
in mind (a focus on upper
56% of the respondents wer
diversity of institutions
The remaining 44% of respo
current British telephone
respondents, careful atten
were drawn from a wide geo
objective the respondents
45 Metropolitan and Non-Me
were respondents from inne
classrooms in Grammar, Com
High Schools in England.

were tabulated into tables for

Sampling Procedure

5) maintains that in order "to obtain a
n data analysis samples ranging from 40
usually desired" (p. 345). Because
populated country with a diversity of
idered desirable to obtain a minimum of
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population. For this reason two
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ions using the purposive technique.
respondents were randomly selected from
hone directories. In selecting the 100
attention was given to ensure that they
e geographic base. To achieve this
ents were selected from 39 of England's
on-Metropolitan counties. Included
inner cities, suburban and rural
, Comprehensive and Secondary Modern
nd.

Collection of Data

On January 15 1991 three questionnaires were mailed to teachers in England with the intention of field testing the instrument. A covering letter was attached describing the research and requesting feedback in the form of comments, suggestions and recommendations with respect to validity, reliability, relevance, accuracy, clarity and correct British terminology. Ahmann and Glock (1981) state that "finding the content validity of measuring instruments is equivalent to showing how well they sample certain types of situations or subject mater" (p.25). In addition, the reliability of an instrument according to Ahmann and Glock, is based on "its capacity to yield consistent information" (p. 239).

Two questionnaires were returned and one respondent indicated that the questionnaire was clear and easy to complete in about five minutes. Another respondent indicated that there had been reports of hostility between opted-out schools and those who had remained under the local authority. He suggested that this might be an aspect of the Reform Act and worth including in the questionnaire. Since this concern had also been voiced in the contemporary literature, it was considered to be a relevant issue and incorporated into question number 16. This respondent also pointed out that since most people are right handed, the

responses indicating the biographic and demographic information could be better located on the right hand side of the page. This seemed to be a logical suggestion and the questionnaire was revised accordingly for ease of completion. With these changes incorporated into the instrument, it was determined to be appropriate for the study and concluded to be reliable and valid.

A pre-letter in the form of a postcard was mailed to each of the prospective respondents on February 1 1991. It provided an opportunity for the writer to make an initial contact and describe the study. One week later, on February 5, a covering letter, revised questionnaire, together with a stamped addressed return envelope was mailed to each of 100 teachers in England. By March 10, 72 questionnaires had been returned and analysis was commenced.

Findings

In the study the findings were presented and analyzed in detail. The mean score for each of the following areas was featured: The national Curriculum, The National Assessment, Open Enrollment, National Control and General Issues. The responses were analyzed and described, both in narrative and graphical format. What follows is a brief overview of some of the findings.

An analysis of question 1 on the instrument indicated

that 82% of the respondents disagreed that "teachers had adequate input in the design of the National Curriculum." While 3% were undecided, 15% felt that they had adequate input Comments from respondents indicated that, although teachers were not consulted and had no input at the inception of the National Curriculum, some had been invited to contribute during the various stages of its evolution. One teacher declared, "had the National Curriculum been conceived of by teachers, we would have had a vested interest in its implementation." Another one commented;

> I believe a National Curriculum is needed . . . I approve of some of the aims of the National Curriculum, especially those which deal with broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. I feel that much was brought in without sufficient consultation and now the government is continually changing its aims which is dispiriting for teachers.

Seventy six percent of the respondents indicated that the National Curriculum had caused an increase in teacher workload. Only 12% disagreed, while a further 12% remained undecided. The nature of the workload is explicit when pondering the following teacher's comments; "I feel the biggest problem has been the speed with which it had to be implemented. I am sure a slower pace would not have resulted in the headaches and stress from which we all now

suffer." Another teacher noted, "The reporting of the assessments and examination results are going to be very time consuming and the way the D.E.S wants them to be reported is misleading and (sometimes confusing) to parents."

With regard to issues concerning the National Assessment, 69% agreed that there was a real danger of a two-tier assessment (one for compulsory subjects and one for electives) developing from the implementation of the Reform Act. Eighteen per cent were undecided, while 13% saw no danger of a two-tier assessment developing. One teacher noted;

> The difficulty in planning for the national assessment is that just as you establish the curricula for the next year (after a couple of years' work) then the requirements change. The latest requirements indicate that some courses may be to G.C.S.E. level while others are not. I can only see a decline in such subjects as Art, and Music at post 14 years because they are no longer compulsory."

The study indicated that 66% of the respondents agreed that Open Enrollment would result in an increase in competition between the segregated rich/poor, black/white schools. Twenty-six percent remained undecided, while 8% saw no danger of this occurring.

Eighty percent of the respondents agreed that there was a possibility of hostility developing between neighboring schools which had opted-out of local control and those who remained part of the local authority. One teacher noted, that this had already happened in some districts. Seventeen percent remained undecided while 3% disagreed with the possibility of such hostility occurring.

Eighty five percent of the respondents indicated that the inservice training sessions were inadequate to "sell" the reforms. Six percent remained undecided, while 7% agreed that the training sessions were adequate.

Seventy two percent of the respondents disapproved of the manner in which the new reforms were being implemented. Ten percent remained undecided, while 18% indicated their approval.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that:

1) There was wide support for a broad and balanced National Curriculum which aimed to raise the level of pupil expectations. It was also discerned that the new National Curriculum in England was viewed as being too definitive and restrictive on pupils and overly prescriptive on teachers.

2) There was inadequate teacher input in the design of

the new National Curriculum and consequently little, or no, vested teacher interest in it.

3) The idea of a National Assessment system in England was viewed with approval, but the one mandated was seen to be excessive, cumbersome and not well thought out.

4) There was a danger of friction and hostility breaking out between neighboring schools which had opted-out of local control in favor of national control and those choosing to remain under local authority.

5) The inservice training sessions for teachers were inadequate to "sell" the reforms in England.

6) Implementation of the National Reforms by the local authorities and D E.S. did not meet with the approval of the teachers.

Recommendations

The third purpose of this study was to present recommendations and suggestions regarding the introduction of aspects of the British reforms into the United States system of education. It is recommended that:

1) In light of the experiences of teachers and students in England, a National Curriculum should not be a priority in the United States at this time. Rather the dialogue between the United States Department of Education and State Governors which was initiated by President Bush in

1989 should be allowed to develop into a continuous forum, for the coordination of curricula. Quarterly conferences with strong teacher representation should be scheduled to find ways to upgrade student expectations and performance.

2) The following aspects of the United States system of education should remain decentralized under local control:

a) Local management of schools under a County Superintendent of Schools and County Board of Education.

b) Student eligibility limited to school attendance in county of residence.

Implications for Further Studies

In this study teacher-empowerment emerged as a major concern and was evidenced in responses and comments made on the questionnaire. Teachers expressed a degree of anxiety at having lost control of the professional aspects of their vocations. This implication is especially supported by replies to questions 1, 2, 4, 7, 12, 13, 17 & 18. In both England and the United States non-teachers have taken over roles traditionally performed by teachers Given the present national controversy over quality education and the need to raise academic standards in the United States, it is suggested that future research focus on teacher empowerment

and the effects it would have on students' academic standards.

A Questionnaire to Ascertain the Impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act upon Teachers in England

DIRECTIONS: Please circle a letter to indicate your reactions to the following statements. The letters mean:

SA	A	U	D	SD
Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Area 1: The National Curriculum

1.	Teachers had adequate input in the design of the National Curriculum.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2.	The National Curriculum is an assault on teacher professional autonomy.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3.	The National Curriculum results in the task of the teacher being redefined as a quality control worker, who measures competencies.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4.	The National Curriculum is causing an increased workload on teachers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5.	Negotiable Attainment Targets agreed upon by individual pupils and teachers are more helpful than fixed Attainment Targets handed down by government committees to 25,000 different schools.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6.	Moving from a strictly age-related-system to a Key Stage system will result in pupils being subjected to excessive streaming.	SA	A	U	D	SD

Area 2: National Assessment

7.	The National Assessment has been imposed from the outside and its aims and philosophy are not part of the thinking teacher.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8.	The formative and supportive aims of the National Assessment are incompatible with its aims of competition; which sets school against school, teacher against teacher and pupils against pupil.	SA	A	U	D	SD
9.	The National Curriculum is only in place to justify the massive assessment that is also being put in place.	SA	A	U	D	SD

10. There is a danger of a two-tier assessment developing: one for G.C.S.E. subjects and one for Non-G.C.S.E. subjects. SA A U D SD

Area 3: Open Enrollment

11. Competition between schools is a healthy stimulus to improving quality. SA A U D SD

12. Open Enrollment makes two tiers of teachers inevitable; those in high paying successful schools, and those in lower paying schools. SA A U D SD

13. The competition between the segregated rich/poor, black/white schools will likely increase. SA A U D SD

Area 4: National Control (Opting-out)

14. Opting-out from local control in favour of D.E.S. Grant-Maintained Status will eliminate bureaucracy. SA A U D SD

15. The D.E.S. extra funding will compensate the opted-out school for; inservice training, advisory services, library and music services and special needs support. SA A U D SD

16. There is a possibility of hostility developing between schools (and ultimately pupils) which have opted out and those which have remained part of the local authority. SA A U D SD

Area 5: General Issues

17. The inservice training sessions have been adequate to "sell" the reforms. SA A U D SD

18. I approve of the way the D.E.S. or Local Districts are implementing the National Curriculum. SA A U D SD

Biographical Data Sheet

Directions: Please complete the following by placing a tick in the appropriate place.

1. Age:

Below 30	_____
30 - 39	_____
40 - 49	_____
50 - 59	_____
60 and above	_____

2. Education:

Certificate of Education	_____
B.A. / B.Sc. / B.Ed.	_____
Honours Bachelor Degree	_____
M.A. / M.Sc. / M.Ed.	_____
Other	_____

3. Years of teaching experience:

1 - 5	_____
6 - 10	_____
11 - 15	_____
16 - 20	_____
20 or more	_____

4. Teaching Subject: _____

Demographic

5. The current pupil population of my school is:

0 - 249	_____
250 - 749	_____
750 - 1499	_____
1500 and above	_____

6. The predominant social background of your area is:

Inner city	_____
Urban	_____
Rural	_____

7. The following best describes my school:

Grammar	_____
Comprehensive	_____
Secondary Modern	_____
Other	_____

N.B. Please feel free to record additional comments on the back.

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